

PEOPLE

'He's a real friend, not just a wine friend'
Olivier Bernard (right)

Image: Françoise Poincet



Olivier Bernard of **Domaine de Chevalier** & **Thierry Gardinier** of **Château Phélan Ségur**

OLIVIER BERNARD WAS born and brought up in Bordeaux and owns **Domaine de Chevalier** in Pessac-Léognan; **Thierry Gardinier** came from Paris for 10 years to run **Château Phélan Ségur** in St-Estèphe, bringing his family with him and, he says, 'diving into a pool where we didn't know many people'. They met professionally; Gardinier's first impression was of a 'warm guy, a warm person'.

Their wives met, liked each other and they started taking holidays together. 'We've celebrated New Year's Eve together many times in Spain, Turkey and France,' says Bernard. 'Our children are friends, too. **Thierry** is one of those guys I like to invite to join family gatherings, with my two sons, my brother and sister, and my father, when he was alive. He's a real friend, not just a wine friend,' he adds.

'We are a bit different, but we share the same values,' says Gardinier. 'That's why we >

Above: **Thierry Gardinier** of **Château Phélan Ségur** (left) with **Domaine de Chevalier's Olivier Bernard**

click. We share an enjoyment of life, we like to entertain, enjoy the fun of life, he and I, but we're serious about what we're doing.' Bernard agrees. 'We have the same values; when we talk of politics, important things, we're on the same wavelength.' Domaine de Chevalier is family-owned and so is Gardinier's company, which owns Domaine Les Crayères in Champagne and has a majority stake in the Taillevent group of restaurants, as well as owning Phélan Ségur. 'Family businesses are not always easy,' says Bernard. 'We like to share experiences.'

'We've known each other for 25, 30 years now, and the first 20 years were very important for us both. It's incredible what has happened [at Domaine de Chevalier], and they've done a lot [at Phélan Ségur]. In 1983 I had 20ha, and now it's 186ha, including Domaine de la Solitude [also in Pessac-Léognan; Bernard has rented it since 1993]. I stay on my property, I stay in Bordeaux, I invest in my region,' he adds.

'Thierry was born in Paris and stayed in Bordeaux while he was running Phélan Ségur, then when his father got older he started to help manage the family company in Paris again,' continues Bernard. 'We still have a strong relationship; he's a very strong friend. We don't have to see each other often. Really good friends you don't have to see all the time, and when you do see them it's like yesterday. We have wonderful times together, even if his children are younger than mine; they're adopted from South America; he did that late.'

Gardinier plays golf; Bernard prefers sailing boats. Holidays often seem to involve the sea. 'We spend our vacations in Arcachon,' says Bernard. '[Thierry's family] decided 15 years ago to go to Brittany. Thierry likes to swim, but he always has to have a warm towel because it's really cold. We're from the south, and for us to swim and be cold is something we're not educated about. We say to him, "Are you sure this is the right place for a holiday?"'

Gardinier retaliates with a story of what really happened one summer night on the bay of Arcachon. 'We were all together, going from the Dune du Pilat to Cap Ferret on a motorboat. We left the restaurant at 2am, and it was a lovely summer night, lots of stars. Olivier, who was almost brought up on the Bassin d'Arcachon and knows it really well, got stuck on a sandbank because the tide was low. So it's 2am, we're a few hundred metres from the harbour and we're stuck on a sandbank.' So they did what anybody would do at 2am – they called a friend with a house nearby, who came and took them off. They slept in the friend's house and in the morning resumed their journey to Cap Ferret. Happy days...

photograph: nicolas/venity

